



Todd Platts

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**Congressional
Update**

**Don't miss the
Town Meeting
schedule below!**

Fall 2011

This mailing was prepared, published and mailed at taxpayer expense.



Dear Friend,

I hope this letter finds you doing well. With the 112th Session of Congress now well underway, I am pleased to update you on the recent actions of the U.S. House of Representatives. I encourage you to contact one of my offices listed above if you have any questions regarding the issues discussed in this newsletter or if there is a federal matter for which my staff and I can be of assistance.

Located below are the dates, times, and locations of my next series of town hall meetings. I greatly welcome the insights and concerns shared at these meetings and I hope you plan to attend the meeting most convenient to you. Your participation is critically important to ensuring that our government remains “of the people, by the people, for the people.”

In closing, please join me in keeping our troops and their families in your thoughts and prayers. But for the selfless service of these true American heroes, along with our nation's military veterans, the freedoms we enjoy every day would not be. God bless them and our great nation!

Sincerely,

Todd Russell Platts



Ride of Heroes – Warrior Ride is a non-profit organization that provides wounded veterans with adaptive bicycles for rehabilitation and recreation. Several wounded warriors and their family members participated in a multi-day ride through Central Pennsylvania and I was honored to meet with them at the U.S. Army War College at Carlisle Barracks. As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I am continually reminded of the sacrifices that our men and women in uniform make to protect the freedoms we enjoy every day.

Balanced Budget Amendment is Key to Fiscal Responsibility

One of the most important actions that Congress can take to restore fiscal sanity to Washington for generations to come is to adopt a balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution. I have cosponsored a version of a balanced budget amendment every session during my service in Congress.

This session I am a cosponsor of two versions, House Joint Resolution 1 (H.J. Res. 1) and House Joint Resolution 2 (H.J. Res. 2). Both proposals would impose a similar requirement for annually adopting a balanced budget as currently exists in 49 states, recognizing a common-sense exception for National Defense under limited circumstances.

The idea of a balanced budget amendment is not new. One of our founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson, was a strong proponent of the idea. More recently, in 1995, following passage by the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate came within one vote of sending a version of a balanced budget amendment to the states for ratification. Ultimately, to secure passage of an amendment to the Constitution, a proposal must pass both the House and Senate by a 2/3rds vote. Then, 3/4ths of all state legislatures must ratify the amendment.

The recent debt ceiling agreement (see related article on page two) included a provision intended to ensure that supporters of a balanced budget amendment have a legitimate opportunity to advocate for the amendment's passage. The Budget Control Act requires that an up-or-down vote on a balanced budget amendment must occur in the House and Senate prior to December 31 of this year. I plan to actively advocate for the adoption of a responsible balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Constituent Service Information

My staff and I stand ready to answer your questions and help resolve matters pertaining to the federal government. While we cannot direct a federal agency to resolve your case in a specific manner, we can help to ensure that your case receives full, fair, and timely consideration. Please do not hesitate to call any of my offices listed above for assistance. Additionally, answers to many of your questions may be found on my official web site (www.house.gov/platts). Simply click on the “Helping You” tab to see a list of subjects, such as Medicare, financial aid to students, and veterans' benefits.

If you are specifically interested in learning more about legislation moving through Congress, I encourage you to visit my web site and sign up for my monthly E-Newsletter. The E-Newsletter is sent only to those who specifically “opt in” to the e-mail list. Your information will not be disseminated to others in any way.

Town Meeting Schedule

Thursday, October 27

Red Lion Area Senior High School
200 Horace Mann Avenue
Red Lion
7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Friday, October 28

Penn Township Municipal Building
20 Wayne Avenue
Hanover
9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Friday, October 28

Adams County Emergency Services Department
230 Greenamyer Lane
Gettysburg
1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Saturday, October 29

Hampden Township Recreation Building
5001 Park Street
Mechanicsburg
9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Tuesday, November 1

Newberry Township Administration Office
1915 Old Trail Road
Etters
9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Debt Agreement Cuts and Controls Spending

During the last nine months, the debate in Washington has clearly changed from one of new government spending to a focus on balancing our books and making government live within its means. Families and businesses across America have been forced to tighten their belts and learn to do more with less. So should Washington.

The recent bipartisan debt ceiling agreement (S. 365) continues the process which began earlier this year of cutting excessive government spending. The agreement is not ideal. It does not solve all of our fiscal problems. However, the final agreement enacts changes that will allow us to control spending in the future and helps to ensure that Washington is held more accountable to the American people.

The final agreement – called the “Budget Control Act” – is a variation of the “Cut, Cap, and Balance” legislation previously passed by the House but defeated in the Senate. Both bills cut spending by more than the debt ceiling is being increased. Both bills do so with controls on overall spending, enforced as needed through across-the-board cuts in different categories. Mandatory spending on programs such as Social Security and Medicare benefits would be exempt from these initial across-the-board cuts, as would be spending related to the global war on terror.

In addition to spending controls, the Budget Control Act creates a joint House-Senate committee to identify further savings. The committee’s recommendations will be given an up-or-down vote in both chambers of Congress. A future increase in the debt ceiling is conditioned on either passage of the joint committee’s recommendations, passage of a balanced budget amendment to the United States Constitution (see related article on page one), or additional across-the-board cuts that would include some entitlement program reductions, as well as further cuts in defense spending.

In total, the Budget Control Act will reduce deficit spending by at least \$2.1 trillion over ten years. The bill passed by a vote of 269-161 in the House and 74-26 in the Senate. I voted in favor of its passage.

I will continue my efforts to put people and good policy before politics and to help enact real solutions to the financial challenges facing America. For more information regarding the Budget Control Act, please visit www.speaker.gov and search “Budget Control Act.” To follow developments with the deficit reduction committee, please visit www.deficitreduction.gov.



***Helping Their Neighbors** – Thousands of citizens and businesses throughout the 19th Congressional District were impacted by the flooding that occurred as a result of Tropical Storm Lee. I worked with **Governor Tom Corbett**, Pennsylvania’s Congressional delegation and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to expedite federal disaster assistance to our region. The flood damage to lives and the local economy would have been worse were it not for the heroic and dedicated efforts of emergency responders such as New Cumberland River Rescue members **Carl Crone** and **Jim Coulson** (pictured above with me touring damaged areas of New Cumberland Borough), who like many other citizens, devoted countless hours to helping their neighbors and communities during this crisis.*



***Hands On Experience** – Each summer, local college students work in my district and Washington offices to learn about Congress and to serve 19th District residents. The interns who served this past summer and pictured from the left are: **Margaret Dombrowsky**, a senior at Bucknell University and daughter of Thomas and Barbara Dombrowsky of Gettysburg; **Emily Harlan**, a senior at Washington and Lee University and daughter of Tom and Kathy Harlan of Mechanicsburg; **Sarah Hasenfuss**, a junior at George Washington University and daughter of Martin and Natalie Hasenfuss of York; **Adam Boyer**, a senior at Penn State University and son of David and Tracy Boyer of York Springs; **Nicholas Stapleton**, a senior at the University of Pittsburgh and son of George and the late Josephine Stapleton of Carlisle; and **Aaron Kraft**, a graduate of Penn State York and son of Adam Kraft Sr. and Patricia Beattie of York.*

Legislation Seeks to Assist Unemployed Individuals

As a result of our nation’s weak economy, millions of Americans are increasingly finding themselves unemployed for an extended period of time. Many of these individuals are not old enough to fully retire and are struggling desperately to make ends meet, especially when their unemployment compensation ends. In response to this situation, I have introduced legislation permitting long-term unemployed individuals to access funds they have in an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) or a 401(k) pension plan without being penalized ten percent by the Internal Revenue Service.

Current law allows for penalty-free distributions from IRAs for out-of-work citizens to purchase health insurance, for up to one year after their unemployment compensation runs out. It also allows for penalty-free distributions from employer-sponsored retirement accounts, such as 401(k)’s, by workers who lose their jobs and are 55 years of age or older.

While health insurance is one reason a family with an unemployed member may want to make withdrawals from their hard-earned savings, there are many other reasons too – such as paying college tuition, repairing the family car, or making necessary home repairs. Additionally, individuals of all ages are struggling in the current economic climate, not just those over 55 years of age. My legislation would thus allow for penalty-free withdrawals from IRA and 401(k) retirement accounts to pay whatever bills the individual in question deems necessary and without regard for their age if their unemployment compensation has run out. Once the individual or family gets back on their feet by finding work, my legislation would allow them to make contributions above the normal annual limit to their IRA or 401(k) accounts for up to five years in order to replenish their retirement savings back up to the levels at which they were prior to the individual being laid-off.

The objective of my bill is simple – reward savings and hard work by those who lose their jobs through no fault of their own. Allowing individuals to use their own savings without incurring a tax penalty to make ends meet is an issue of particular importance at a time such as now when the unemployment rate continues to exceed 9%.

Job Creation Must Be Prioritized

Since the 112th Congress began in January, the U.S. House of Representatives has prioritized a legislative agenda focused on putting people back to work. House-passed legislation has sought to improve the job climate in various ways, such as: easing the tax burden on small businesses; repealing burdensome, redundant government regulations; and, increasing the development of domestic sources of energy. Unfortunately, more than a dozen House-passed jobs bills are still awaiting action in the Senate.

I appreciate President Barack Obama's stated willingness to partner with Congress on this critical issue of job creation. Hopefully, the President and Senate leadership will follow the House's lead in advancing pro-growth policies that remove government barriers to private sector job creation. By enacting such policies, as well as seeking to further rein in government spending, we can provide greater certainty to job creators over the long-term, helping the private-sector to better plan and invest.

One area of apparent agreement between the President and House Republicans is the enactment of free trade agreements with Korea, Panama, and Columbia. These agreements are critical to opening up expanding markets for American goods and ensuring that American companies and farmers are competing on a level playing field with their foreign competitors. It is unfortunate that, while President Obama called on Congress for many months to approve these trade agreements, he delayed until earlier this month formally submitting them to Congress for an up-or-down vote.

The Speaker of the House has announced plans to vote on additional legislation in the months ahead targeting job creation, with a prioritization of proposals that have bipartisan support. Such areas of agreement may include a reduction of the "red-tape" that is holding back many road construction projects and a reform of the unemployment compensation system.

In the interests of creating a better environment for job creation, Members of Congress and the Administration must act in good-faith to overcome their differences if we are to be successful in fulfilling our responsibilities to the American people, especially those individuals and families that have been hardest hit by the on-going economic downturn. As always, my decisions on these and other issues will be guided by the merits of the issues before me, not partisan politics.



Paying Tribute—On Memorial Day, I was proud to join with members of the Hampden Township Volunteer Fire Department and the Hampden Township Veterans

Recognition Committee to pay tribute to all Americans who have paid the ultimate price to defend the United States and the principles upon which America was founded. Also participating in this event were State Representative [Glen Grell](#), members of Cub Scout Pack 279 and Boy Scout Troops 88 and 276, and numerous local officials.



Calling All Artists—Each year, the Congressional High School Art Competition recognizes the artistic talents of young citizens. The 19th District's winning entry was

"A Glimpse in the Sky," a photograph by [Tonia Shoemaker](#). A twelfth grade home-schooled student from Dover, Tonia is the daughter of Eric and Kim Shoemaker (pictured above with me). Information regarding the 2012 competition can be found on my website at <http://www.house.gov/platts/services/students.shtml>.

Legislation Considered in the 112th Congress

Since the current session of Congress began in January, the United States House of Representatives has debated and passed a wide variety of bills and amendments. Below is a partial listing of this legislation. The bills and amendments listed in bold were either enacted into law or enacted as a change to House rules; the other bills and amendments have been passed in the House but have not yet been considered in the Senate. The House-passed legislation:

- Cuts current Congressional budgets by 5%, saving taxpayers \$35 million annually (**H. Res. 22**).
- Bans "earmarks" in the House of Representatives (**House Republican Conference Rules**).
- Cuts non-security discretionary spending to below the pre-stimulus, pre-bail-out levels of 2008 (**H. Res. 38**).
- Proposes to repeal the new health care law that will cost taxpayers \$2.6 trillion over ten years (H.R. 2); instructs House committees to report replacement legislation that will reduce health care costs (**H. Res. 9**); and ends funding for the implementation of the new health care law (H. Amdts. 102, 104, 105).
- Repeals a burdensome new IRS paperwork mandate that was imposed on small businesses (**H.R. 4**).
- Seeks to save taxpayer money by: ending duplicative government printing (H.R. 292); terminating the federal program that subsidizes Presidential elections and national party conventions (H.R. 359); cancelling unobligated balances for ineffective housing programs (H.R. 839, H.R. 830, H.R. 861); and, eliminating a "slush fund" contained in the new health care law (H.R. 1217).
- Requires House committees to inventory and review regulations issued or proposed by federal agencies, identifying those regulations that are impeding private sector job creation (**H. Res. 72**).
- Proposes a budget resolution for future years that: freezes discretionary spending at below 2008 levels; builds on past welfare reform efforts; ends corporate welfare; enhances the solvency of Medicare; and, reforms the tax code in order to boost economic growth (H. Con. Res. 34).
- Allows certain veterans at private colleges to receive higher tuition reimbursements under the post-9/11 GI Bill (**H.R. 1383**); makes it easier for veterans to file appeals for denials of their claims (H.R. 1484); and, increases penalties for businesses that misrepresent themselves as "veteran-owned" (H.R. 1657).
- Funds the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Defense while trimming their overall budgets by \$1.1 billion and \$21 billion, respectively (H.R. 2017, H.R. 2219).
- Lifts a moratorium on energy exploration along the Gulf Coast in order to help ease high energy costs (H.R. 1229, H.R. 1230, H.R. 1231).
- Prohibits the EPA from imposing costly, job-destroying greenhouse gas regulations on employers without first obtaining Congressional approval (H.R. 910), and ends funding for the enforcement of the EPA's greenhouse gas regulations (H. Amdt. 101).
- Keeps the United States government from defaulting on its obligations while also establishing enforceable limits on spending; establishes a joint committee on deficit reduction; and, guarantees a vote in the House and Senate on a balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution (H.R. 2560, **S. 365**).
- Cuts Congressional budgets for the 2012 fiscal year by an additional 7% (H.R. 2551).

For more information regarding these or other bills considered by the full United States House of Representatives, please visit www.gop.gov/legdigest/bills.

Amendment to Improve Treatment of Troops Suffering From Brain Injuries Adopted

The U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee (HASC) approved an amendment which I sponsored on May 11, 2011 to the Fiscal Year 2012 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 1540). The amendment directs the U.S. Department of Defense to establish guidelines for the rehabilitation of our nation's courageous military personnel who have suffered traumatic brain injuries.

Since 2005, I have been proud to serve as Co-Chair, along with U.S. Congressman Bill Pascrell (NJ-8), of the bipartisan Congressional Brain Injury Task Force. As Co-Chair of the Task Force, I was pleased to sponsor the above-referenced amendment in coordination with the Office of U.S. Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords (AZ-8).

Traumatic brain injuries from blast exposures are the signature injury of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We must do right by the men and women in our military who serve in harm's way by ensuring that they receive the highest quality of medical treatment available in order to lead meaningful and productive lives post-injury.

It is estimated that more than 300,000 American soldiers deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan have experienced a possible traumatic brain injury. These injuries can include those caused by shrapnel, but also injuries with no visible signs caused by shockwaves from improvised explosive devices and mortars. Due to significant scientific and medical advances, more service members are surviving the acute stages of blast injuries.

My amendment ensures that guidelines for post-acute rehabilitation of moderate to severe traumatic brain injuries are established for our military personnel. Such medical guidelines will make certain that our service members have access to treatment that works. After the adoption of my and other amendments, HASC approved H.R. 1540 by a vote of 60-1. Subsequently, the full House of Representatives passed the measure by a vote of 322-96. H.R. 1540 is now pending in the Senate.

Platts Holds Hearings on Government Waste and Fraud

When I was appointed Chairman of the Subcommittee on Government Organization, Efficiency and Financial Management at the beginning of this legislative session, I stated that tax dollars should be treated in the same manner that families and small businesses treat their own funds – in the most efficient and responsible manner possible. As part of the full House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, my subcommittee has conducted a number of oversight hearings focused on waste, fraud, and inefficiencies within the federal government. My goal in conducting such hearings is to promote financial management reforms that will help all federal departments and agencies be more accountable to taxpayers. Topics examined at the hearings have included:

- **Wrongful payments by the federal government.** The federal government made more than \$125 billion in improper payments in 2010. Such improper payments could be an incorrect payment, an over-payment, or an under-payment, and they could include a fraudulent payment to an ineligible recipient, a payment for an ineligible service, a duplicate payment, or a payment for a service not received. The subcommittee hearing underscored the need for federal government departments and agencies to strengthen internal controls to better ensure taxpayer dollars are spent wisely and responsibly. The use of newer technologies, continuous transaction monitoring, and third party evaluations are examples of the types of reforms that were highlighted by hearing witnesses. (April 2011)
- **Financial management at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).** In 2004, I worked with Rep. Ed Towns (NY-10) to sponsor the DHS Financial Accountability Act. This law placed DHS under greater financial controls and scrutiny. The subcommittee hearing focused on improvements made since that time and what still needs to be done. For example, since the beginning of his Administration, President Obama has failed to nominate anyone for the Chief Financial Officer position at DHS, the top fiscal officer at the Department, as required by the DHS Financial Accountability Act. I recently wrote to the President's Chief of Staff, Bill Daley, regarding the Administration's failure to comply with the Act. (May 2011)
- **Tax identity theft.** At least 20,000 taxpayers have had their tax refunds stolen right out from under them and that number continues to grow, according to the Government Accountability Office (GAO). Every year millions of dollars of tax refunds are paid out to identity thieves who file for a tax refund using a stolen name and Social Security number. Taxpayers victimized by this fraud often find out only after they have legitimately filed their tax returns. Numerous 19th District residents have reported being victims of such tax fraud, which delays law-abiding citizens receiving their refunds and costs taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. My staff and I are working with U.S. Senator Bill Nelson on legislation to combat this type of fraudulent activity. (June 2011)
- **Improper payments within the Medicare program.** As discussed above, the subcommittee has made improper payments by federal government departments and agencies a top priority. In 2010, the government estimates that improper payments by Medicare alone totaled \$48 billion. Testimony at the subcommittee hearing delineated that many of Medicare's improper payments are a direct result of insufficient internal controls and inadequate financial management within the agency. As we work to strengthen the solvency of Medicare, we cannot afford to ignore this element of the debate. I plan to continue working with the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services and other department personnel, along with the Government Accountability Office, to strengthen Medicare's financial management systems and better protect taxpayer funds. (July 2011)
- **Accountability at the Department of Defense.** The men and women who serve in the Department of Defense (DOD), whether they are military or civilian personnel, work tirelessly in defense of our Nation and its citizens. While the success of these heroic Americans is unparalleled on the military front, DOD has struggled for many years on the administrative front to accurately and responsibly account for billions of taxpayer dollars. Improvements to the Department's financial management systems are critically important not only to protecting taxpayer funds, but also to ensuring that we meet the needs of our troops serving in harm's way. Since 1995, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has designated financial management at DOD as a high-risk area due to pervasive and systemic deficiencies in its management practices. The subcommittee's hearing examined the Department's efforts under its "Financial Improvement and Audit Readiness (FIAR) Plan," efforts that are focused on ensuring that DOD can achieve a clean audit of its books no later than 2017. (September 2011)

For more information about these or other hearings held by my subcommittee, please visit www.oversight.house.gov and select "Subcommittee on Government Organization, Efficiency and Financial Management" under the "Hearings" tab.